

# The next generation: Studio 740 provides an artistic home for Bray artists

By Marga Lincoln  
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Fearless creativity – could be the motto for Studio 740, where dream and risk go hand in hand.

It's a new ceramics studio on the rise in the historic Old Distillery building at 740 Front St.

"This whole place is built on dreams," said artist Beth Cavener, who first conceived of the idea and is the major investor in the venture.

She and two other former Archie Bray Foundation resident artists, Alessandro Gallo and Chris Riccardi, converted it into a light and airy ceramics studio.

And they've already brought in another artist, Noah Riedel from Pottery Northwest, to join them.

All three of the former Bray residents wanted to return to Helena because the Bray was such a profound turning point in their careers.

Cavener said that after seven years as a studio artist in the small town of Garfield, in eastern Washington, she was ready to be near other artists. "The first place I thought of was Helena."

A resident artist at the Bray from 2002 to 2004, Cavener said, "it was an absolutely pivotal time of my career. This place and history has a deep personal meaning for me. This is the place I want to come home to."

For Cavener and Gallo, who are the delighted parents of an infant, Niccolo, Helena seemed the perfect place to start their new artistic and family adventure.

Being near the Archie Bray, with its international role in the ceramics community, was



From left, artists Alessandro Gallo, Beth Cavener, Chris Riccardi and Noah Riedel show off their new Studio 740 in Helena.

(Photo by Thom Bridge/courtesy of the *Helena Independent Record*)

an irresistible draw, said Gallo.

There's a whole new generation of Bray artists who want to make Helena home, he added.

Initially leading the way in the 1980s and 1990s were other Bray artists who chose to make Helena their home: Robert Harrison, Sarah Jaeger, George McCauley and Eric Van Eimeren – to name a few, and before them Richard and Penny Swanson.

The next generation includes not only the Studio 740 artists, but also Tara Wilson, Mel Griffin and David Peters.

Studio 740 also offers a space for Bray artists in transition, like Giselle Hicks, who completes her Bray residency in December and will move in, said Cavener.

And it will be a teaching space. "I love teaching and mentoring," she said. "I want to bring in young people from all over the country." There's also a plan to bring in international artists to teach workshops.

Riccardi, a decade or so further along in

his art career, took the leap along with Cavener and Gallo.

"Chris' commitment is really staggering," said Cavener. "He's seriously a founding father."

"We took a huge risk," said Riccardi of his decision. "I worked 20 years at the nonprofit the Armory Art Center (in West Palm Beach, Florida)."

But he felt ready for a major change.

"The Bray changed my view on ceramics, it gave me a huge boost in confidence," he said. He had been making bronze casts of his sculptures until his Bray residency changed that. Now his focus is ceramic sculpture.

Riccardi not only quit his job, but uprooted his wife, Melody, their three kids and their dog.

"I just loved Helena," he said of what sealed the deal.

When asked about their big dream and the risk, Cavener takes a deep breath before answering.

"All of us have never let money direct us," she said. "It's just a tool to get at what we want to do."

They're all in this adventure together. They already have established careers and galleries they work with. But they intend to market themselves as a group, Studio 740, nationally and internationally, for gallery shows and teaching workshops.

Not only does artistry and friendship draw them closer, but it's also what inspires and informs their sculptures.

"We all have a different appreciation of the figure," said Gallo.

To learn more about the artists, visit [helenaair.com](http://helenaair.com) and search for Studio 740, or head to [www.facebook.com/Studio740](http://www.facebook.com/Studio740).



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## Meet up with MAC on Facebook

"Like" us for updates on Montana Arts Council activities and opportunities, as well as information for and about artists, arts events and organizations across the state: [www.facebook.com/pages/Montana-Arts-Council/347466251951287](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Montana-Arts-Council/347466251951287).

## Western Art Week (from page 1)

**The March in Montana Auction and Dealer Show**, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. March 18-21, at the Town House Inn: The 28th annual show and sale of fine western art and cowboy and Indian antiques and collectibles culminates in auctions at noon Friday and Saturday. Live online bidding is available; lots are posted online and in the full-color catalog (307-635-0019 or [www.marchinmontana.com](http://www.marchinmontana.com)).

**The Out West Art Show and Sale**, March 18-21, at Best Western Plus Heritage Inn: 114 exhibit rooms are filled with works by more than 140 artists. The show kicks off from 6-9 p.m. Wednesday with the opening celebration, featuring live music. Thursday brings a performance by Missouri River Dance of "The Story of the Buffalo Dance." Friday and Saturday highlights include a Quick Finish at 2:30 p.m. and an auction of those works from 4-5:30 p.m. Demonstration and music are on tap throughout (406-899-2958 or [www.outwestartshow.com](http://www.outwestartshow.com)).

**Great Western Living and Design Exhibition**, March 19-22 at the Four Seasons Arena at Montana ExpoPark: with over 80 vendors showing the best of the west, this show boasts something for everybody. Boot makers, furniture makers, clothing and jew-

elry artisans share an array of custom-made and unique creations. Enjoy music nightly by Pollo Loco, Almeda Bradshaw and others (406-761-0288 or [www.thegreatwesternshow.com](http://www.thegreatwesternshow.com)).

**Wild Bunch Art Show**, March 18-21 at the Holiday Inn: 16 artists from three states show and sell their work during the annual event, which kicks off Wednesday with a meet-the-artists gala reception. A portion of proceeds benefits the Great Falls Children's Museum (406-868-9649 or [www.anadinepickthorn.com](http://www.anadinepickthorn.com)).

**Missouri Falls Fine Arts Show and Sale**, March 20-22 at La Quinta Inn and Suites: The Arts Association of Montana returns to Western Art Week with 15 fine artists selling their work; ceramist Judy Ericksen is this year's featured artist. Meet her and other artists during at reception 4-8 p.m. Friday (406-453-4076).

**Studio 706 Artist Guild Spring Show**, March 19-21 at the Mansfield Center Gibson Room: 26 member artists showcase their works during Western Art Week. Offerings encompass all types of fine art, including paintings, wood carvings, pottery, photography, stained glass and ceramics. A reception



Furniture-maker Mike Roths of Bear Paw Designs in Stevensville is among the artisans showing work at the Great Western Living and Design Exhibition.

is on tap 5-7 p.m. Thursday; guild artists give demonstrations throughout the event (406-781-4635 or 406-452-5771).

**Jay Contway and Friends Art Show**, March 19-21 at the Hilton Garden Inn: Professional artists from the western United States and Canada host their own exhibits (406-452-7647 or [www.jaycontway.com](http://www.jaycontway.com)).

For more information, visit [www.westernartweek.com](http://www.westernartweek.com).

## Arts and cultural events receive Special Events Grants

The Montana Department of Commerce recently awarded \$150,000 in funding for events across the state that help support Montana's vibrant tourism industry as it continues to bring new revenue to the economy. The funding is being made available through the Montana Office of Tourism's Special Events Grant Program (SEGP).

The Montana communities receiving SEGP grants this year are Bozeman, Ekalaka, Glasgow, Hamilton, Kalispell, Missoula, Seeley Lake, Stevensville, West Yellowstone, White Sulphur Springs, and Wolf Point. Grant funds are available for event marketing and promotion outside a 100-mile radius of the event.

"Montana's special events are both culturally rich and economically important," said Commerce Direc-

tor Meg O'Leary. "These grants are investments into community efforts enjoyed by residents and travelers alike."

Arts and cultural events receiving SEGP awards are:

- The Ekalaka Shindig, \$7,350; sponsored by the Carter County Museum, Ekalaka;
- McIntosh Apple Day and Liquid Apple Night, \$8,760; sponsored by the Ravalli County Museum and Historical Society in Hamilton;
- Big Sky Documentary Film Festival, \$23,178; sponsor by the Big Sky Film Institute, Missoula;
- In the Footsteps of Norman Maclean Festival, \$20,701; sponsored by Alpine Artisans, Inc., Seeley Lake;

- Western Heritage Days and Chuck Wagon Cook-off, \$6,351; sponsored by the Stevensville Main Street Association; and

- Red Ants Pants Music Festival, \$30,271; sponsor by the Red Ants Pants Foundation, White Sulphur Springs.

The SEGP was developed in 2002 to assist communities with economic development through the creation and/or enhancement of annual, on-going events. To date, the SEGP has provided over \$1 million in grant funding to 129 events in various Montana communities. Learn more at [www.travel-montana.org](http://www.travel-montana.org).

For more information, contact the Montana Office of Tourism staff at 406-841-2870.